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Primera Iglesia Hispana Asamblea de Dio Emmanuel

by Leonel Alberto

For this final field trip report I will be sharing my experience at a Christian Pentecostal Sunday service which I attended at the Primera Iglesia Hispana Asamblea de Dios Emanuel (First Hispanic Emmanuel Assembly Church of God which is pastored by Reverend Ernesto Gil. The church is located at 7909 Walmsley Blvd Richmond, VA 23235. Spanish services are held every Sunday from 2:45pm to 4:30pm with bible school being from 1:30pm to 2:30pm. The church also holds services on Saturdays from 7:30pm to 9:30 pm, as well as Thursdays from 7:30pm to 9:30pm as well.

This church has a very modern structure to it; it is quite different compared structure of a Catholic church. The church entrances are through the sides with a main hall and alter section towards the rear of the building and a hallway leading to the bible school classes and the pastor's office towards the front.

Walking into the church there are ushers waiting to greet members and guests into the church, if you are visiting the church for the first time they take down your basic information including your name, address, and phone number. The reason for this is to try and retain any newcomers and encourage them to continue to attend the church services. The typical greeting is a hand shake and a kind "God Bless". Being that this is a Hispanic church the majority of the members are from Latin American countries, at this specific church the dominant countries represented

are Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Mexicans with a few Caribbean members. Most members live humble lives, mainly working in industries such as landscaping, construction, and maintenance. I noticed that the church consisted of many members that attended with their spouse, mostly married couples with children and with a few single mothers or single fathers who seemed to be regular church goers. The gap in age difference was quite apparent as there were many children and teenagers but there were not many members looking to be in their early twenty's; however the majority of members were mid-aged adults.

Throughout the service I felt very comfortable and welcomed by the church members, with membership looking to be close to 150 members. Everyone seemed to have a certain loving characteristic to them which made everyone around me very approachable. As the service went on there were members willing to explain what was going on and the significance of what was being said or done.

When I first entered the church I took my seat and waited for the service to begin. Once the congregation was together and situated the service began with the reading of a bible verse followed by an opening prayer, led by an usher. The entire congregation seemed to be in a unanimous state as they prayed and spoke to God through their prayer. I noticed that as soon as everyone finished praying, it seemed

as if they were left with a very peaceful and satisfying feeling within themselves. Following the opening prayer was the music, there were gospel songs that were sung and it was amazing to see the congregation join in with clapping and singing.

Pentecostals do believe in speaking in tongues, and there were a few members which began to do so while feeling the Holy Spirit. Throughout the service the overall tone seemed to be filled with love for God and for one another making the environment feel safe, even to those who had never been there before. Before the sermon, the offering was picked up and members had no problem giving their weekly offering to the church. After the offering the pastor came up and began his sermon.

Before starting to preach he asked the congregation to bow their heads and pray. This prayer being made asking the Lord to use him as an instrument of his word and to give the congregation the message HE desired. The sermon lasted for about forty-five minutes and once the pastor started to come to an end he made an invitation to all of those in the church who had not accepted Jesus to come forth and do so as that moment was their opportunity to be saved for eternity. This invitation was to be made at the end of every service in hopes of allowing guests or active goes who had not accepted to take that step. The service and the members made this experience very pleasant and very inspirational. •

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